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TAGS: ILAB EMIN SOCI ZA

SUBJECT: Digging Deeper into the Pit of Child Mining

REF: Lusaka 573

¶1. (U) Summary: A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report on child labor in Zambia's non-traditional mining sector--the first of its kind--revealed that child miners are routinely exposed to significant health hazards. NGO representatives at the post-presentation discussion cited high education costs, the lack of alternative income sources, and lax enforcement of safety laws as central to the problem. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On July 14, P/E intern attended an ILO meeting to discuss findings of the U.S. Department of Labor-financed "Rapid Assessment of Child Labour in the Non-Traditional Mining Sector in Zambia." The report addressed child labor in formal and informal non-copper/non-cobalt mines. In attendance were trade union, mining federation, NGO, and government officials (including Labor Ministry representatives). Findings show child labor in non-traditional mining is a concern, but less so as compared to the agricultural sector (where 90 percent of child labor in Zambia occurs). The ILO report expands a thin body of knowledge on the subject (reftel). However, findings are anecdotal and cannot be generalized across Zambia.

¶3. (U) Children in the study tended to be older teenagers (though miners as young as seven were included) from large, poor households. Most had dropped out of school, leading NGO reps to cite non-tuition costs (e.g. uniforms and school supplies) as a concern. These participants emphasized that government and NGOs should provide families with alternative income-generating activities. They also repeated often-heard concerns about the role of HIV/AIDS in driving orphans into the mining sector.

¶4. (U) Child miners face significant health hazards. They are exposed to harmful substances, suffer heat-related illness, and endure physical and psychological stress. Many are undernourished. Open-air living quarters increase their risk of contracting malaria. NGO reps suggested (and ILO personnel concurred) that because many children live unsupervised among their peers, they are susceptible to alcohol abuse, sexual exploitation, and STDs.

¶5. (U) NGO reps mentioned lax enforcement of Zambia's mining and safety laws as a pressing concern. Informal mining in particular has largely escaped oversight. In light of the Cabinet's slow progress in approving a national child labor policy, as well as the Minister of Labour and Social Security's failure to sign the statutory instrument regarding the worst forms of child labor, NGO reps expressed concern regarding government's ability to act promptly. Attendees also cited government resource constraints as an obstacle to increasing the scope and frequency of mine inspections. At the meeting's conclusion, a representative from the Zambian government's Department of Mine Safety verbally committed to improving the training of mine managers and safety inspectors, as well as increasing the frequency of inspections. The ILO will organize a follow-up meeting in 4-6 months.

KOPLOVSKY